

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 17, 2013

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki  
Secretary of Veteran's Affairs  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

Recently, I had the opportunity to meet with Under Secretary for Benefits Allison Hickey and discuss the backlog of disability claims at the Winston-Salem VA Regional Office (WSRO). I appreciate Under Secretary Hickey's attention to this urgent concern and believe we had a constructive conversation about the challenges facing the office.

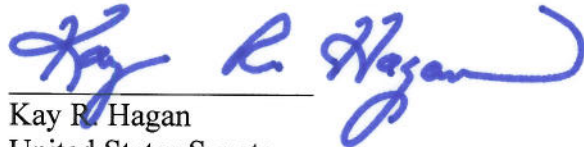
I was glad to hear that some of the recent initiatives implemented by the VA have reduced the average number of days claims are pending from 329 to 200 days and improved rating claim accuracy. However, as I discussed with Under Secretary Hickey, I think we can all agree that there is still much more work to be done and room for further improvement. I plan to continue my close monitoring of the situation and hope you will do the same.

While I understand that the VA has made progress in processing new disability claims in a timely manner, I am concerned that there may not be similar initiatives in place to address the backlog of appeals that seems to be growing larger by the day. Appeals provide our veterans with an opportunity to ensure they have received a fair rating on their disability claim. After all they have sacrificed for this country, we should protect that right and ensure it is carried out in a reasonable amount of time.

Currently, there is a backlog of nearly 11,000 appeals at WSRO, and I was shocked to hear that in some cases, veterans are waiting up to four years or longer to receive a decision. For that reason, I am asking you to take a personal interest in solving this issue, and I would like to hear what the VA's plan is to address this growing problem. We need to put the same emphasis on reducing the backlog of appeals as we have on claims; to do otherwise is only trading one problem for another.

I am proud that almost one million veterans call North Carolina home, in part because our communities have opened their arms to these heroes. I am deeply committed to keeping our promises to our veterans and maintaining North Carolina's reputation as the most military and veteran friendly state in the country, and I will continue working to ensure that our veterans receive the care and support they deserve. I hope you will give this matter the attention it deserves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Kay R. Hagan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

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Kay R. Hagan  
United States Senate